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# CONSTANT WOMAN:

*A DRAWING-ROOM DRAMA FOR TWO*

*And a Parlourmaid.*

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BY

J. REDDING WARE.

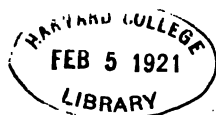
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## CONSTANT WOMAN:

### A Drawing-room Drama for Two.

SCENE: *Drawing-room, with windows looking out upon a beautiful garden.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.—MRS. SCATTERLEIGH, COLONEL SAWYER, and  
BRACKLEBURY (a lady's-maid).

DISCOVERED.—*Mrs. Scatterleigh and Bracklebury.*



BRACKLEBURY: The colonel, ma'am, has brought these papers and wishes to know whether you will see him?

MRS. S.: No; I can see nobody to-day except the gentleman whose name I have given you. Be good enough to tell Colonel Sawyer my determination.

BR.: Yes, ma'am. He seemed anxious.

MRS. S.: No doubt; and liberal?

BR. (*smiling*): The colonel has a free hand, ma'am.

MRS. S.: Home—to nobody.

BR.: Yes, ma'am. (*Exit BR.*)

MRS. S.: What can these papers be? (*Opens one after the other.*) To seventy-three panes of glass in conservatory; to three eucalyptus globosus; to one Norfolk pine; to four cucumber frames, &c., &c. Ah! these are the receipted bills for the damage done to my place by his troublesome St. Bernard dog, Nero.

COL. (*opening door*): I beg your pardon.

MRS. S. (*smiling*): I beg *your* pardon. I am at home to nobody.

COL.: Hence my appearance—for *I* am nobody. A landlord is nobody (*entering*). May I come in?

MRS. S.: Certainly, colonel, you are not a man to take two bites at a cherry.

COL. S.: Why should I (*sitting*)? May I take a chair?

MRS. S.: Why not? Any mere chair can be on all fours with your own good understanding.

COL.: I don't follow you, Mrs. Scatterleigh.

MRS. S.: But you do, Colonel Sawyer.

COL.: Really, I know of no better example than yourself to follow.

MRS. S.: They must have been admirably polite in your regiment!

COL.: We were very distinguished.

MRS. S.: May I venture to ask the reason of this visit?

COL.: I was afraid you were about to say visit-ation! May I—Ah! I *have* taken a chair.

MRS. S.: I am all ears.

COL.: Oh! I don't see *that*. Let me explain. Hearing that you had determined to see nobody, as a colonel and gentleman I was bound to disperse; but as a landlord, and therefore nobody, I felt I might come in.



MRS. S.: So much by way of explanation. Thank you, the chimneys have not taken to smoking, and all the windows are behaving themselves. The pump is a little erratic; but what can you expect of a mere pump, and as every lock is in perfect order, not one requires re-warding.

COL.: The fact is, I have come to give you notice.

MRS. S.: Notice?

COL.: Yes; you are a yearly tenant—not many years, by the way. Your six months' notice must begin from the 29th of September—to-morrow is that goose-honoured day—and I must trouble you to go out with March.

MRS. S.: But why? I pay my rent.

COL.: With a horrid punctuality, for you never give me the chance of calling twice for it.

MRS. S.: Am I a bad tenant?

COL.: You are too distractingly good altogether to remain—a tenant.

MRS. S.: Where is the notice, if you please?

COL.: It is in my waistcoat-pocket, madam, over my heart, perhaps unpleasantly warm—I mean the notice—because it is so beating—I mean my heart. I trust I make myself understood?

MRS. S.: Oh! it is the notice I understand, Colonel Sawyer. Pray let us be regular. Is that it? Thank you. But I am still at a loss to know why I am—noticed.

COL.: Who could avoid it? As a tenant I looked upon you only as a part of the property; as a neighbour, you are impossible—at all events with a party-wall between us.

MRS. S.: I beg your pardon—we are completely detached.

COL.: Alas! we are.

MRS. S. (*smiling*): Certainly, *not* two bites at a cherry.

COL.: Why should one? Life is so very short, and cherry-biting is over in no time.

MRS. S.: Oh! there are other fruits.

COL.: Some of them forbidden.

MRS. S.: Yes; life is so odd.

COL.: Well, people go in pairs sometimes.

MRS. S.: Indeed! I have the notice! Anything else?

COL.: I have chained up Nero. I really could not expend all my substance in paying for his vagaries.

MRS. S.: Thank you, but I do not care to chain up Bijou. By the way, as your dog could not destroy my property (or yours) chasing my poor Persian cat if this creature were—say, in Teheran, perhaps I ought to pay half these precious bills.

COL.: I think not. But why spectacles?

MRS. S.: Alas! my sight is going.

COL.: Tut, tut! What if you became blind, all alone in the world as you are?

MRS. S.: Ah! it gives you no shock.

COL.: Why should it? A charm the more, for you would not see everything.

MRS. S.: Very good; but I am still to learn why I have received this precious notice.

COL.: Have you time to hear me. It is a long tale. Pray let me take another chair—a little nearer. You will hear better.

MRS. S.: You will pardon me if my eyes wander a little?

COL.: Why should they not? This is quite a free country.

MRS. S.: You were about to say—

COL.: Left in life an orphan at twenty-four.

MRS. S.: Ah! Your biography! But why skip over the cradle?

COL.: I will begin before *that* if you like?

MRS. S.: No, no.

COL.: Oh! don't be afraid. The family clock only came in at the moment when I was *born*, and struck twelve. It was supposed to be an omen. Anyhow, a well-regulated timepiece cannot strike more of them than a dozen—and I became a soldier—health excellent!

MRS. S.: Don't be selfish.

COL.: Nay! it is the invalids who are selfish, as well you know, for poor S. must have been a considerable teaser before he took flight and left his best angel behind him upon earth. Fortunately, she flew not after him!

MRS. S. (*laughs*): If you did but know how droll you look when you try to be sentimental!

COL.: That kind of thing is *not* in my way. As I was saying—

MRS. S.: We had reached twenty-four.

COL.: And three months—when I had a love affair, which turned wrong.

MRS. S.: You should have turned round.

COL.: I did, and thought of women in general!

MRS. S.: I think you may slide over those chapters of your life, colonel.

COL.: Not at all—it puts me in so shining a light. The fact is that I never tried to make love to a married woman but I found her husband was the best fellow in the world. His honour was as dear to me as to himself, and I became, so to speak, his hidden guardian.

MRS. S.: And there is no halo of glory round that noble head! Pray proceed,

COL.: So I decided that the only way of being the owner of an honest woman was by marrying one—and here I am!

MRS. S.: You've been a long while on the journey.

COL.: But this is my station, madam.

MRS. S.: Stop, stop! What about the notice?

COL.: That's the alternative. I could not have you near me, my dear neighbour, unless you were nearer, and of course dearer.

MRS. S.: I presume that I may look upon this statement as a declaration?

COL.: It is open to that construction.

MRS. S.: So I'm either to go in six months, or stay for good?

COL.: Admirably comprehended.

MRS. S.: Why did you not speak out sooner?

COL.: Oh! you told me I was not a man to take two bites at a cherry, so I thought I would show I could be roundabout if I chose. However, you may set me an example of brevity with a short "Yes."

MRS. S.: But are you sure you love me?

COL.: Certain!

MRS. S.: I had no idea of it!

COL.: Nor I a month since. But this cat-and-dog life has opened my eyes.

MRS. S.: I am sure I have opened mine—(*slowly*)—but—

COL.: I don't like the "but."

MRS. S.: My good friend— No, no, you are quite near enough. My dear colonel has it ever struck you that the greatest charm of woman is constancy?

COL.: Well, I should certainly like my wife to be constant and very kind.

MRS. S.: Let us take the point as an abstract proposition.

COL.: Woman! constant woman!

MRS. S.: There you are quite right, colonel. It is woman who is ever constant, where constancy is possible. It is men who so thoroughly vary in all they say and do.

COL.: But why glasses? Why are you wearing glasses?

MRS. S.: Why, because I have my plan. I am about to test for constancy.

COL.: You talk in riddles. They are delightful at the end of a magazine, but I do not see their force in a *tête-à-tête*.

MRS. S.: Let me explain. I had the dearest friend; she married, and I was her dear friend no longer. A year passed, when one morning a lady, who came with an acquaintance of mine, and thereby entered without a card, flung herself upon my neck and entreated my pardon for her neglect and ingratitude. I look at this strange person, who is very ordinary, and who is wearing glasses, and I am under the impression that I have never before seen her in the whole course of my natural life. Then she calls me by my Christian name.

COL.: Mabel!

MRS. S.: How do you know that?

COL.: Name in full—agreement for letting house. Never forgotten it.

MRS. S.: And then I discover that this poor visitor is my dear old friend. Poor, constant woman! She had found her husband everything to her until one fatal

day she succumbed to slight smallpox, which left her eyes weak, and under the necessity to adopt spectacles. From that moment her husband saw nothing in his wife. Thereupon debarred from marital love, she returned to music and to me. Oh! constant, constant woman—inconstant, changeful man! But, why, colonel, do you look so grave?

COL.: I am as good at seeing through a brick wall as any colonel in the army. You are about to test someone with a pair of mock spectacles, so to speak. You are going to test somebody's constancy with the barnacles in question. This day you expect a lover, madam.

MRS. S.: What perspicacity!

COL.: You are right.

MRS. S.: You can hardly suppose that I chose poor Scatterleigh from out amongst all mankind to be mine? The fact is that he was found for me, and I became his with my eyes shut. I loved, colonel, and I was loved again, I wrote to him, calling upon him to be constant, and wait until I was a widow.

COL.: Constant, constant woman! Did he wait?

MRS. S.: Well, no, not quite that. But he married an elderly woman, and thereupon promised to wait—and we have, so far, nobly. But I do not wish to suffer as my poor friend has suffered. Suppose I was to become plainer, colonel, it would be terrible to have one's second dropping one for, say, his third. Therefore I am going to test him. These spectacles are worn to try his constancy. If he is proof against their glitter, and if he can bear with a nervous twitch I shall put on for the occasion, I am his, and I shall give up the tenancy, when I shall wish you good morning and a quick re-letting.

COL.: And if he cannot stand the twitch and the spectacles?

MRS. S.: Well, then! But I never speculate.

COL.: But what about yourself, my dear lady? Suppose that in the course of time the gentleman should have deteriorated—suppose that *he* wore a pair of spectacles, and suppose that he could not do without them. Suppose he had a twitch, and that he could not get on without it—are you quite, quite sure?

MRS. S.: Quite sure.

COL.: What of?

MRS. S.: That I should not flinch in my constancy. Oh! I guessed at your cruel inuendo in a moment. Ah! how very little—how very little you know faithful woman! No, my dear colonel, when a woman loves she loves for ever.

COL.: There is where she breaks down. She should do nothing of the kind if the other side is no longer worthy.

MRS. S.: What care we for mere personal appearance? Little does it matter to us the appearance of a man. He may be old or young, good-looking or the contrary—it matters naught. It is the heart, the heart—his noble qualities—which alone charm us.

COL.: If he is a cripple?

MRS. S.: We are his crutch.

COL.: If he is bent double?

MRS. S.: We only see his upright spirit.

COL.: If he stutters?

MRS. S.: We know that he thinks without hesitation.

COL.: One leg?

MRS. S.: He is less likely to run away.

COL.: One arm?

MRS. S.: The other is left with which to caress us.

COL.: Deaf?

MRS. S.: He is less likely to hear the voice of a rival.

COL.: Ah! Constant, constant woman!

MRS. S.: Steady as a rock in her affection.

COL.: Oh! 'Tis the man who is the weather-vane!

MRS. S.: How rarely does woman meet with men of your penetration, dear colonel!

COL.: And when is he coming, my dear neighbour? [*Knock at house-door.*]

MRS. S.: He has come!

COL.: And I! At least you will bear in mind that I am not yet departed.

MRS. S.: I should be sorry to send you out by the back way, and perhaps it would be too trying to let him see you depart by the front. Again, you are my neighbour, and neighbours have their privileges. Here are several society papers; but fortunately there is a sofa, so that when you fall asleep you will be quite comfortable. How my heart beats!

COL.: But think of the spectacles.

MRS. S.: You recall me to myself. *Au revoir.*

[*Exit.*]

COL.: Certainly I consider if there is one social thing more doleful than the rest it is—waiting for each other. Besides it is absurd. The wiseacres tell us we are completely replaced every seven years, therefore if you wait that time actually the other side is no longer in existence—it is somebody else, with whom you cannot, in common honour, have anything to do. Great amazement!—here she comes back again already. She has been constant half a minute!

[*Enter Mrs. S.*]

COL.: Have you forgotten something?

MRS. S. (*gasping*): No; nothing. Will you give me a chair

COL.: Certainly; they are all your own, so far. But do you mean to keep the gentleman waiting?

MRS. S.: What, for my hand?

COL.: No, for an interview.

MRS. S.: I have seen him, Colonel Sawyer.

COL.: What a tone! One might fancy that you had observed his ghost.

MRS. S.: Do men ever bring actions against women for breach of promise of marriage?

COL. S.: It has been done, but they will have to be quick about it in future, as our rulers are rising to the point of stopping that kind of thing.

MRS. S.: Men are such tyrants.

COL.: Of course that is proved by the number of actions for breach of promise of marriage which weak women have to bring against men. Ah! you should see the victims in court. Of course by victims I mean the—women.

MRS. S.: Of course—I am a victim.

COL.: Could he not stand the spectacle presented to him?

MRS. S.: Yes, he did—there is where I am so shocked! He was not even discomposed, and accepted the glistening glasses without a blink. Why, if he loved me, the change in my appearance would have shocked him; and he was not even moved.

COL.: But I thought you wanted him to accept the ocular helps?

MRS. S.: So it may have appeared to you; but we women are such creatures of instinct! We never go wrong, and I know he cannot love me for myself, or he would have been shocked at the apparent change in me.

COL.: But you said that if he were shocked you would reject him.

MRS. S.: We are such creatures of instinct, Colonel Sawyer. We are never wrong. Of course he is thinking of my fortune. I feel completely degraded. However, I hope I am merciful. I shall certainly save the poor man from the crime of committing himself to an interested marriage.

COL. (*laughing*): What! you have refused him?

MRS. S.: How can you laugh at such a serious moment if you have the least regard for me? I consider that I have been grossly insulted. It is completely as though I had seen him calmly proposing to another woman. "Paul," I said, "I am quite short-sighted. Can you bear it?" and without waiting a moment he said, "My angel!" so I flew away. Imagine a short-sighted angel! Again, if he were content with me half-blind he could not appreciate the charm of perfect sight, and I can see as far as most people.

COL.: Meanwhile, my dear neighbour, the gentleman is waiting.

MRS. S.: The more shame for you to allow it, Colonel Sawyer.

COL.: I?

MRS. S.: You; certainly. I did not remember the poor man was waiting. You did; therefore, you are to blame.

- COL.: But this is your house.
- MRS. S.: No; it is yours. I am merely a tenant. Tell him to go. Say he need not call again.
- COL.: (*moving to the door*): Shall I say you have thought worse of it?
- MRS. S.: Well, that would be an answer, would it not, just as well as any other?
- COL.: (*returning*): By the way, if he is not the same man you expected to see, you account him a stranger, and hence, I presume, the summary ejection.
- MRS. S.: No, no, Colonel Sawyer. I am, indeed, constant. Woman is always constant. But woman's self-respect must be maintained, and when she is accepted at a blow, in what I may call a maimed condition, she must maintain her natural rights!
- COL.: Teeth?
- MRS. S.: Well, he smiled so vulgarly that—
- COL.: That you noted a good many out—awful notches on the road to the grave! Perhaps half?
- MRS. S.: As a matter of fact, not a third left. Don't snap your teeth, Colonel Sawyer!
- COL.: What about eyes, now?
- MRS. S.: There you are hopelessly wrong, for he has, I firmly believe, only one! Don't—don't take observations first with one eye, then with the other, Colonel Sawyer!
- COL.: Constant woman! Now, what about hair, madam? As iron grey as mine?
- MRS. S.: My poor colonel, this is a bad morning for you. You are quite wrong again. Bald as an egg!
- COL.: Constant woman—oh! constant woman!
- MRS. S.: So we are—most. Indeed, I admire him—at a distance. He might have deceived me with a false set. I pardon him the deception of the glass eye. We must all be merciful, and it is only just to admit that he might have cruelly taken advantage of my simplicity through the medium of a wig. But I CANNOT pardon his accepting the spectacles at a blow in a moment! Tell him to go. Tell him I'll send him a cheque. I mean—I mean, get him out of your house.
- COL.: Shall I go too?
- MRS. S.: No, you may stay. He might come back.
- COL.: He might—at any time.
- MRS. S.: How dense you are! Would he if you always remained here?
- COL.: Oh! I see. You accept me?
- MRS. S.: These men; they comprehend nothing. They have no instinct; precisely as they have no constancy.
- COL.: (*going to the door*): Constant! Constant Woman!







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